



First day back at work. Everyone stares as I walk in. Line manager looks up, does a spit take. I sit at my desk, which looks unusually tidy, and remove my flu mask.

Nervous glares and smirks. "Martin," the manager gasps, "where have you been???"

"Uh...at home?" I reply. Where does he think I've been? In the jungle?

"I called," he continues. "We haven't seen you since..." – he looks up – "since...in months?"

"Uh huh?" I say, thinking: what the fuck's he on?

"I don't understand...you didn't reply? We emailed...left messages..." he ploughs on.

"Eh?" I say. "I've been working from home!" He looks baffled. "We all have! The coronavirus!" I yell.

"You had...a virus?" he squints. Open up Outlook: 3,432 unread emails.

"Back to work, scum!", hisses the shadow banshee, speeding over to my desk. And then: ***WEEOW!*** The demonic entity lets rip a volley of blood-curdling squawks. ***WEEOW!*** it shrieks in my face. ***WEEOW!! WEEOW!!***

11/05

2.40am. **WEEOW!! WEEOW!!**

Fuck's sake. Can't they knock boots at midnight? It was cute in Issue 3; now it's just inconsiderate. I know – I'll google fox gestation periods. No, don't. Go back to sleep. No, I need to know, *now*. Could the raver outside be the *offspring* of the vixen from Issue 3? Am I witnessing the orgasmic yelps of a *new vulpine dynasty*? Don't be dumb. She couldn't have birthed a cub since Issue 3 – and even if she had, said cub couldn't possibly have reached sexual maturity yet. Lockdown's not been going on *that* long. But...how to know for sure?

Nah, I'll go back to sleep...as soon as the randy fleabags pipe down. Try to clear my mind. Nope, not happening. Energy levels rising...nervous system sparking up. OK, time for a *proven* K.O. sleep ritual...

GILPORT LIONS vs VALLETTA FC...a critical cup tie in a football league within a parallel universe...one cognizant to only the most hardcore of insomniacs!

Since taking over at Valletta FC, manager Mick McCarthy has presided over a string of dismal 0-0 draws – much welcomed by the exhausted Maltese supporters who just want to get some kip. Gilport Lions, meanwhile, are bound to field their latest signing – yet another defender. Tactically, Valletta plans to plod up to Gilport's 10-0-0 formation and then hoof the ball over their heads and into the empty stands; a strategy they deployed to great effect when playing Stenhousemuir last season. This should result in another effortless scoreless draw, provided the Lions' keeper doesn't...

13/05

Did Americans really start glugging Dettol on Trump's recommendation? I'm never sure whether to believe these stories. For every *Sun* reader who swallows the line about swan-eating Poles, there's a *Guardianista* happy to suck up any hokum involving our allegedly dense Septic cousins. It's like the

US Corona beer boycott; I doubt it *really* happened. Then again, we had Molotov-packing vigilantes in Portsmouth mistaking paediatric clinics for nonces' hideouts, so who knows? Or did we? Was that fake news too? Nah...I can believe that of Portsmouth.

If you think *Bat Flu*'s a load of rambling tosh, have you ever read Samuel Pepys' plague-time scribblings? Now THERE's an account that'd make drying paint scream. *Down comes my wife to me in her night-gown, and we began calmly, that upon having money to lace her gown for second mourning, she would promise to wear white locks no more in my sight, which I, like a severe fool, thinking not enough, begun to except against, and made her fly out to very high terms and cry, and in her heat told me of keeping company with Mrs. Knipp...* what the fuck?!? Come on, even my Oi! poetry about the DLR in Issue 2 was better than that.....! I think?

not directly covid related but can anyone recommend a place who can do MacBook repairs locally that is still operating? with WFH my laptop is essential and work have basically told me to sort it myself

14/05

Awake at 7am. Grab the work mobile: ta-dah! Logged into Microsoft Teams, super-early. Roll over.

THERE'S A SUPER-DUPER MISSILE AND IT'S POINTED AT YOUR HEAD. THERE'S A SUPER-DUPER MISSILE AND IT'S GONNA KILL YOU DEAD. Highways Maintenance van parked outside, softly playing Everything But The Girl, *Missing*. Driver having a fag, white flu mask yanked below his chin, gives me a friendly nod and I nod back. Alright mate! Fucking weirdo. Get off my street.

It's sunny but the wind's whipping up the trash. My mum calls me to complain about the government food package for shielded persons. REVIEW: The Heinz tomato soup's OK, apparently, but the tea SUCKS. She reveals she traded some items, including the potatoes, with her neighbour – which doesn't suggest a whole lot of 'shielding' to me and makes me wonder if she's *really* staying put on the sofa and streaming live mass services from empty churches around the world.

But who am I, my mother's keeper? Would I want my offspring telling me what to do in my 80s?

New guilty pleasure – *90-Day Fiancé*. The bit where the fat yank gives his young Filipina wife-to-be some grotesque lingerie and a bottle of mouthwash is priceless. The look she gives him when he tells her she's got dog's breath is basically my face whenever someone mentions 'hauntology'. Then he asks her to take an STD test! Even buying an M.I.A. CD in 2005 didn't make me cringe this hard.

15/05

Shoplifter action in Sainsbury's today. Some bloke, possibly high or insane, storming around the store and angrily effing and blinding, asking who's up for a fight. 25% "shall I record this for a Twitch improv stream" / 75% "please don't come close and breathe on me". Would *hate* to have got this far and then been ventilated by a random nutter. "YA FUKKN..." he snarls as he eventually lurches towards the door, clutching a bottle of something alcoholic.

Store manager emerges, as soon as the coast's clear. "Why didn't you stop him?" she snaps at the security guard. "He didn't pay for that. You just let him walk out." Security guy impassive, not even a shrug. Just a blue flu mask and big sad eyes. She then shoots sourpuss daggers at the small queue I'm in, as if we should've done something. The cheek of it! And at these prices too!

16/05

OK, so booze + Saturday night + internet access = Nark Central. A pattern has emerged.

“*Disgusted*” – René Crevel’s suicide note.

18/05

The ethics of wishing death on Boris Johnson. My parents once told me: “*Curses are like chickens, they come home to roost.*” I’ll reiterate: it’s best not to fuck around with chthonic forces. What do I know, though? I never had a sigil come true. Only ever wanted the name of the winning nag. Never saw a warlock partying in St Tropez or scooping the Lotto jackpot. Actually, I know sweet FA about the occult – but **IF** I was getting ready for a big night out and a crow suddenly crashed into the window and malevolently CAWWWW’d at me as it slid down the glass, I’d ditch my plans, *sharp-ish*. Always heed a bad portent. Snap a matchstick after use; blocks the Devil from crossing over into this realm. Never light a cigarette from a candle; every time you do, a sailor dies. Squeaky Jinks told me that one. Step on a crack, break your mum’s back – my poor mother has awful back problems and it may be down to me blithely careering around on the pavement. Though lifting patients in and out of hospital beds and bathtubs when she was in her 20s probably didn’t help.

What I’m trying to say is: if The Reaper – The Great Leveller – Mr Smiles himself – comes to claim the fucking Etonian goof, just let him get on with it. Turn your head. You don’t want to get hit in the crossfire while you’re cheering from the sidelines. Sometimes it’s best to not get involved. Let Sir Death do his scythe-work solo; he has everything under control and doesn’t need some noob with a placard getting in the way. You don’t need to gawp at roadkill. I’ve written most of this after the best part of a bottle of vodka. Does it make sense? I hope so. Because I never want to explain it again.

19/05

We want to welcome employees back with socially distanced open arms and build our way back out of this mess.

Been invited to a yacht-themed Zoom cocktail party on the ‘Virtual Riviera’ tomorrow evening. I guess we’re meant to log in sipping Negronis, displaying tasteful marina backdrops? Rather than, I dunno...a bottle of Buckfast and the *Bullseye* opening credits?

The spider in the bathroom has become four. The foxes are at it too – earlier, tonight. Cheers, appreciate it. A furry hind leg propped up against a lamppost: **WEEOW! WEEOW!** Hurtling towards the climax of their rutting season; bonking beneath the speed camera, which I mistook for a 5G transmitter back in April. Still, they’re nowhere near as annoying as the birds; heard *those* feathered fucks wheetin’ an-a tweetin’ at 3.45 the other morning! How can this be allowed? Nothing as depressing as bird chatter when you can’t sleep. Mao had the right idea; cull ‘em all with a catapult.

Our CEO resigned today. Good riddance, get stuffed. About time, ‘n’ all. I had a nagging feeling the old fart was itching to herd us back into the office – back to the pestilent air-con and strip lighting. With him out of the picture, and our line manager busy learning Esperanto in his garden, we’ve got a bit more time to ourselves in the jungle. And I’m treasuring every minute of it. Just try and pull me out of the wardrobe, I dare ya. Not even sick of cheese and chilli sauce on toast yet.

20/05

Worst yacht-themed Zoom party EVER. Took 10 minutes to connect; was quicker getting into (real life) Slimelight without kohl eyeliner. When I finally gained access to the Zoom Room, it was full of nerds. Some male slag fake-laughed and pulled faces. Another partygoer was trapped inside his Zoom background; his nose and chin dipped in and out of the NYC skyline. Then – KZZPPPPTT. My laptop overheated and conked out. Ejected from the virtual yacht... by my own doddering PC. I opened a can of IPA, delivered by Howling Hops of Hackney (can I have 15% off the next order? I'm sure my zillions-strong readership will hit your site up, *pronto*) – can't remember which brew now... Crusty Mermaid? Vampire's Breath? *Ubik*? – and thought of Amsterdam.

Me and Ashok were thrown out of a (real life) yacht industry party in Amsterdam last year. I *KNEW* we were gonna get rumbled, minutes after we'd bullshitted our way into the event; everyone else was sipping bubbly from flutes, while we were swigging beers we'd nicked from Raytheon. Straight away, a red-faced fat man with a shock of white hair and specs made a B-line for us.

"YOU SHOULDN'T BE HERE GET OUT," he spluttered, in one monotone breath.

"*Excuse me?*" I countered, genuinely infuriated and ready to kick off. Why do people have to be such utter *cunts*? I'm not some fucking gundog, you prick. "We're press...we're invited," I said.

"You're NOT invited because this is MY party and it ISN'T for press," he spat. "People paid £1,000 to be here!" *They got ripped off, big time.* He summoned over a girl in a turquoise Chinese-style shirt/dress – can't remember her name now, let's call her Karen. "Karen, get them out," he belched, as she flashed him a "*shit...do I have to?*" look.

"Why did you single **US** out?" Ashok asked, pointing to a group of white blokes with media passes. "Is it 'cos...?" he continued, gesturing at himself. Ha ha, brilliant! Maybe he's not the sharpest tool in the box – but he can pull out the razors when we really need 'em. Mr Tomato Chops got all flustered, especially as his guests had now noticed the commotion and were looking our way.

"Look," I said, taking the moral high ground, "if there's a mistake, you could just talk to us like human beings... instead of storming over and roaring!" Karen rubbed her wrists and diverted her gaze to the carpet. Ashok then repeated what I said, pretty much. Thank you, my parrot.

"You shouldn't be here," Ruddy McDowall exploded. "How did you get past security? Who let you in? Tell me who let you through!!"

Really?? A grass?...Me? "How should I know?" I retorted. "I didn't ask their names!"

He was gonna call more security goons, so we slowly trudged up the stairs to the exit, taking our time. King Crimson tailed us, way too close for comfort...pressed up close to my back, shepherding us out. And then – *oh blessed St Martin de Porres, did I ever stray from thy care!* – our persecutor tripped over. Fell sideways, right on the step behind us. I turned around and saw him tumbling backwards, down six or seven steps, sprawling like a bloated lobster in chinos, check shirt and boating shoes. Champagne-quaffing billionaires stared. Karen's eyes like saucers. Time for one last rusty razor to the wanker's ego:

"Are you drunk?" Ashok asked him.

25/05

Fear of suffocation. Card no. 12, The Hanged Man. Pirates scragged: the privateers laugh; the girls' hearts skip a beat. The hankie obscures the condemned man's face. Maritime law enforced. An elderly Alzheimers patient who drowned from pneumonia. Drowning – the most peaceful death, he once told me. Guess he found out the hard way. A CT scanner panel descending. Premature burial. A virus that hops borders and leapfrogs into your airways. Lethal droplets. Spit in the eye. Knee on the neck. Rivulets of piss beneath a squad car. Isolated in an iron lung. The tube driver who never made it home. Teargas on the Bogside; Knights of Malta applying baking powder to young faces. Wheezing, sneezing. Choking to death on your own words.

01/06

Today's reading: *The Plague* by Camus. Better late than never, eh? Don't remotely regret my fling with PKD, but think it's fading now. Watching America burn on YouTube, and starting to realise why *Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said* had such a visceral effect on me last month – in retrospect, it really feels like a portent of what's rocked up since. No spoilers. Police state paranoia to the max.

04/06

Happy birthday to me. Toot toot. 44 years on this dustbowl.

Houlihan on the blower, sending his regards and regaling me with tales about his mate who turned 49 and topped himself. "HE WAS FUCKED IN THE HEAD," he explains. "BUT THE LAST TIME I SAW HIM, HE SAID SOMETHING REALLY INTERESTING...HE HATED THE FACT THAT ATTRACTIVE BIRDS IN THEIR 20s WOULDN'T LOOK AT HIM ANYMORE...WELL, THEY DID, BUT NOT IN THE SAME WAY...LIKE THEY WEREN'T INTERESTED IN HIM...THEY WERE VERY POLITE...BUT IT WAS LIKE THEY FELT SAFE AROUND HIM...LIKE THEY PITIED HIM A BIT...KNOWWHATIMEAN? IT REALLY BUGGED HIM."

"Thanks, that's really cheered me up," I reply. Truth is...I don't need to wait 'til 49: I already noticed that shift when I turned **30**. Fancy killing yourself over that, though.

4am, June 5th: one bottle of Smirnoff drained, and I can't sleep – again. Thankfully, the temperature's dipped, so I can close my windows to block out the birds' infernal racket. Think it's time for this zine to peace out. It's been real but, like the lockdown, it seems to have run its course. I think? Otherwise, I'll do Issue 7 come the second wave.

I lied about 'The Queen's Beat', by the way.

Or if you have a printer at home do you think I can print a few documents in black and white? I have been in isolation for months and will be wearing a mask also happy to wait outdoors. Would be a massive help xx

4.25am. Grey dawn sky and rain. Guess it's back to 'normal'. Time for...the Insomnia League Cup. Houston Dynamo are playing Sligo Rovers. Spectators yawn and check their mobiles. Under new FIFA rules, both teams have ingested large quantities of Tuinal. Zombie ref on crutches blows the whistle. Another uneventful match underway. Another dull, repetitive series of...

And then – the fans storm the pitch. ***WEEOW! WEEOW!***

REVIEWS

COCTEAU TWINS: “HEAD OVER HEELS” (4AD)

This was the last physical CD I bought this year, which turned up in the post on 12th March; the night I went down the pub in Issue 1. Since then, I don’t think a day’s passed that I haven’t played at least something from this disc – so, by default, this has become my *Official Soundtrack To The Pandemic*.

I spent years not giving a toss about the Cocteaus. At worst, I think I once wrote something about them being *lumpy-faced spods, fronted by a fishwife*. Can’t remember if that was a BTI blog post or on the Dissensus forum. Heard the band speaks well of me too. Anyway, I retract that slur.

In 1982, when the Cocteaus put out their debut LP *Garlands*, Siouxsie & The Banshees released their last genuinely great album, *A Kiss In The Dreamhouse*. It’s a miracle the latter came out at all, what with the guitarist’s attempts to drink himself to death (he got there eventually) and Sioux tripping off her nut and nearly losing the plot while being stalked by her ex-boyfriend/ex-manager. In retrospect, I think this was the precise point that the spirits departed the Banshees and possessed the Cocteaus instead, who took that whole *dreamy goth schtick* to heights that mid-to-late-‘80s Siouxie simply couldn’t scale – though she had a damn good try on the first Creatures LP.

Head Over Heels probably isn’t the best Cocteaus album, but now it’s shot through with personal memories of these crazy months, where early April already feels as distant as 2010...so how can I be objective about this? Or write sensibly about playing *In Our Angelhood* on a loop while sneaking out for a 1am walk in my Treatment mask, wondering what I’d say or do if I encountered any other midnight ramblers (never did)... and hoping that midges *couldn’t* transmit the virus?

Maybe you think it’s flippant and selfish of me to sentimentalise these times. I’m *flattered* you’d imagine I’m immune to death, disease and unemployment. But I remember reading about those first 10 deaths in the UK – barely a fortnight after I’d been larking around in several crowded pubs and venues in Brighton – and then the body count rocketing towards the first thousand as I watched the empty nightbuses roll past at 3.30am, with *Five Ten Fiftyfold* on repeat... thinking that, musically and lyrically, this song was created for *this EXACT moment in time*... the thought that there are people I’ll likely not see again, and all the emotions *that* throws up...dashed against the adrenalin rush of recovering my body and mind from the daily grind.

But somehow, playing *Five Ten Fiftyfold*, gazing down on the twilight silence of Finchley Road, I felt...I dunno, *connected*? Like, for a split second, I was with youse all – in spirit, at least.

Anyway, 10/10. They may have been lumpy-faced spods fronted by a fishwife... but they’re *my* lumpy-faced spods fronted by a fishwife, now – and I’ll fight any goddamn troll who wants to smirk “*Poor man’s Xmal Deutschland :D*” in my direction. *(MARTIN C)*

MINOR THREAT – “MINOR THREAT” EP (dunno, got it off Soulseek)

A peanut in shorts, hollering about how he doesn’t drink. Just what nobody asked for. Who cares what DC thought of New York? I don’t even care what he thinks about me requesting MDMA in my COVID group. Poor man’s Chaotic Youth - and Fugazi sucked too :D *(ULRIKE MEINKRAFT)*

